



## Answers to Common Parent Questions Regarding Changes to Indiana's NCSC Alternate Assessments<sup>i</sup>

**1. Why is Indiana replacing the current alternate assessment, ISTAR, for English/Language Arts and mathematics?**

As part of the ESEA Flexibility Waiver requirement a fully operational alternate assessment based on the 2014 college-and-career ready English/Language Arts and Mathematics Indiana Academic Standards must be administered by the spring of 2015.

**2. What does college and career readiness mean for my child who has significant cognitive disabilities?**

The academic instruction designed for college and career readiness will have value for every student. It will promote improvements in communication, mathematics and reading performance, independent and team work skills, expected social skills for the student's age and skills for identifying and requesting needed supports. College and Career readiness in the NCSC model includes community readiness. Most of the skills that any student needs to be prepared for a college and a career are related to the skills that students with significant cognitive disabilities also need for success in the community. Some students with significant cognitive disabilities can attend college taking credit and non-credit courses and have long-term employment. You can find a list of these college programs at <http://www.thinkcollegeindiana.org/index.php>. There are two parent resources with more information about college and career readiness for students with significant cognitive disabilities at <http://www.ncscpartners.org/resources>.

**3. What is the National Center and State Collaborative?**

The National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) is a consortium of 24 states and five national organizations. NCSC has a grant to develop a new alternate assessment aligned with college-and-career ready standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in mathematics and English Language Arts (E/LA) by the 2014-15 school year.<sup>1</sup> E/LA includes reading and writing. NCSC is also developing optional curriculum and instructional resources and professional development modules which will be publicly available at <https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/mediawiki>. You can read more about NCSC partner states and organizations at <http://www.ncscpartners.org/about>.

**4. Are schools required to give an assessment like this to students with significant cognitive disabilities?**

Yes. Two federal laws, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) require that students with disabilities participate in state assessments. States are permitted to use an alternate assessment, like the NCSC assessment, for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The state departments of education and

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<sup>1</sup>Individual states may be on different implementation timelines.

the U.S Department of Education collect data on the participation and performance of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in the alternate assessments. States are permitted to establish policies that cover rare circumstances when a student cannot take the assessment.

**5. Why are state assessments important for children with significant cognitive disabilities, including those whose disabilities are considered profound?**

It is very important for students with significant cognitive disabilities to take state assessments in order to hold schools, districts, and states accountable for the educational progress of all their students, regardless of disability. The performance data from state assessments are expected to be used to improve the educational system. Research shows that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can perform well on academics when they have had the opportunity to learn the content. Challenging state assessments designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can raise expectations and improve instruction and performance. In fact, alternate assessments have demonstrated that many students who are considered to have profound cognitive disabilities have learned much more than previously believed. Although the assessments focus on academic content, working on this content also helps build critically important functional skills.

**6. How are the NCSC assessments different from previous state assessments that have been given to my child?**

ISTAR was a teacher rated assessment aligned to the previous Indiana academic standards. Students did not engage with the test items. The standards have been broken down into smaller benchmarks called the Core Content Connectors (CCCs). The CCCs describe what students on an alternate assessment are expected to know and be able to do in both subjects. The NCSC assessments are based on college-and-career standards for English/Language Arts and Mathematics. These assessments include reading/writing and mathematics. The NCSC assessments will take approximately 1.5-2 hours per subject, which can be broken down into shorter testing periods. Most of the 30 questions on each assessment will ask students to select the answer (e.g. multiple choice) with some questions asking students to create a response using their method of communication (e.g. picture symbols, not limited to “written” responses). There is a parent resource, called NCSC AA-AAS FAQs at <http://www.ncscpartners.org/resources>, which provides more details about the NCSC assessments.

**7. How will this online assessment be given to children who cannot use the computer program?**

Most students will use the online testing program directly on the computer, with support as needed from the test administrator. If a student cannot use the computer program, the test administrator may print out testing materials and enter the student’s answers into the computer. Local training, oversight, and audit procedures will help ensure the tests are administered appropriately and student responses are entered accurately into the test.

**8. How will my child’s teachers be able to focus on teaching my child the functional skills he/she needs to be successful in the community if the focus of the assessment is on academics?**

College and career ready academic instruction will promote many important skills that improve the ability of a student to function successfully in the community. In addition, most other functional skills can be learned and practiced as part of academic instruction. Cooking, taking

medication, traveling on the bus, making purchases, and engaging in many employment tasks involve following multi-step directions, recognizing the meaning of symbols, and understanding numerous math skills. Effective communication is the most important functional skill of all. Reading and writing instruction can include using picture symbols or other communication methods. NCSC has made it a priority to provide resources designed to help teachers find a way for students to communicate effectively.

**9. If my child does not have a consistent way to communicate, will she be able to take this assessment?**

There will likely be a few, rare situations where a student does not have an effective communication system with which to answer the questions during the assessment. There is protocol in place to address whether the assessment can be stopped if the student is unable to respond.

**10. How long will it take to get the assessment results and how will the results be reported to parents?**

NCSC will meet state and federal timelines for release of test scores, including parent reports. Since this is the first year of this assessment, it is anticipated that parents will receive reports for their child in late summer/early fall 2015, which provide test scores and performance levels in mathematics and English/Language Arts. These reports will provide descriptions of what their child can do in reading, writing, and math.

**11. What is the process for deciding which students will participate in these assessments?**

The Case Conference Committee makes the determination yearly if the alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) is the most appropriate assessment. The criteria is available at: <http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/assessment/criteria-determining-participation-istar.pdf> Generally, students who take this assessment will have significant cognitive disabilities that affect the student in both E/LA and mathematics, and in all settings (including home and school).

**12. What supports are offered to teachers of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?**

Project SUCCESS is an Indiana Technical Assistance Resource Center that supports higher academic achievement for students with disabilities. They build local capacity to ensure that students with significant cognitive disabilities achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes and leave high school ready for post-secondary options. For more information about Project SUCCESS: <http://projectsuccessindiana.com/content/>.

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